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Youths' violent resistance of necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 in Nigeria's vanishing foodscapes and waterscapes

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

COVID-19 pandemic
Ethical quandaries
Egoism
Altruism
Necropolitics
Foodscapes

ABSTRACTS

This article interrogates the necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 in Nigeria. The article explores how the landscape emerges at the intersection of COVID-19 regime and structural violence and materializes in foodscapes and waterscapes of the country. It, also, analyzes ethical quandaries arising as the brutal violence of the regime is amplified by structural violence in places and spaces of residence, recreation, leisure and labor of ordinary people. Using qualitative data derived from primary and secondary sources, the article demonstrates that the necropolitical landscape reconfigures social relationships, meanings and identities embedded in places and spaces where people interact with each other and with food and water to produce youth's violent resistance as well as vanishing foodscapes and waterscapes. These changes ultimately impose the status of a living-dead on ordinary people in Nigeria. The article concludes that without the provision of adequate palliative, devoid of food fraud, geography of corruption, gender and ethnic-biases to every citizen, the government loses its moral ground to implement its COVID-19 regime. To meet the gap between what Nigeria can afford and what is required to implement the regime, both the government and its financial elites must embrace economic justice. Finally, the government should opt for a modified regime that factors the extant material conditions of the have-nots into the arrangement.

1. Introduction

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) also known as COVID-19 disease arrived on the Nigerian shores on 27th February 2020. The federal government reported that the first index case is an Italian who came for business meeting in a cement industry in Ogun state. Some people dismissed the report as untrue since no picture of the patient was published in any media. Others saw it as an attempt by the ruling class to divert attention from the nagging issues such as poverty, insecurity and inequality. Only very few thought it to be true. On 9th March, the driver who drove the Italian tested positive for the virus. As time progressed, children of some members of the ruling class, key members in the presidency, and some governors of states also tested positive while others were advised to embark on self-isolation. Many infected persons have mainly been individuals living above the poverty line. Between the first case announcement and the time of writing this article, 44 have died, 255 discharged, and 1233 are still active (Nigeria Center for Disease Control, 2020).

As the number of the dead and positive result took an upward trend,

many elites began to donate humanitarian aid such as money, food stuff and medical items to government at federal and state levels. Also, foreign aids from China, European Union, USA and others were received by the federal government. The donation from Nigerian financial elites, with vast war-chest, accounted for a higher percentage of the total donations. Despite these donations, the Federal Ministry of Finance was caught by Nigerians begging for free ventilators. The ministry had tweeted Dear @elonmusk @Tesla, Federal Government of Nigeria needs the support of 100-500 ventilators to assist with #COVID-19 cases arising every day in Nigeria (Akinkuotu, 2020). The ministry's message was considered by many Nigerians as an act of unseriousness as well as an attempt by the ruling class to avoid spending money donated by philanthropists for the purpose of controlling and containing the disease. Avalanche of criticisms against the message, including those accusing the government of neglecting health sector despite yearly huge budget allocation, made the government to apologize and to describe the appeal as a mistake (Daniel & Onyedika-Ugoeze, 2020). The government also declared physical distancing a norm in all public places and later followed it up with a closure of all public places, excluding sites of essential

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100193>

Received 30 April 2020; Received in revised form 23 May 2021; Accepted 15 July 2021

Available online 26 July 2021

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services. The federal government declared a two-week total lockdown in some States and in the Federal Capital Territory. Most governors, also, replicated what the federal government did by declaring a two-week lockdown in their respective States.

At the expiration of the lockdown on 14th April 2020, the federal government extended it to another two weeks. The government increased its capacity to test suspected individuals for the virus; trace contact persons; treat patients with the virus; and train health workers. It, also, promised to increase its efforts in distributing palliatives to the poorest of the poor. Many governors, also, toed the line of the federal government by locking down their respective States for another two weeks. Implementation of this decision is still on-going as at the time of writing this article.

Before the lockdown, the government gave less than 24 h in some places for people to buy food and water. Those who could afford these essential items went and stockpiled the items. Those who live hand to mouth, continued to experience diminishing and varnishing foodscapes and waterscapes, which are the culturally meaningful, sensorially active places in which humans interact with food and water and with each other (Orlove & Caton, 2010; Okorie & Ajayi, 2019; Okorie, Mphambukeli, & Amusan, 2019). Possible outcomes of the varnishing foodscape and waterscape in homes are scarcity, worry, anxiety, bother, thirst, hunger, anger, sad, frustration, dirt, malnutrition and compromised immunity (Wutich & Ragsdale, 2008).

To ensure a full compliance with the lockdown, handwashing, wearing face masks, among others, the government dispatched a combined team of army and police to patrol highways and major roads. Relevant government agencies and ministries were empowered to arrest and prosecute dissidents for public disobedience. Mobile courts were inaugurated in many States to ensure speedy trial, conviction and sentencing of offenders. Also, the government adopted the World Health Organization guidelines for managing, controlling and containing the pandemic (Nigeria Center for Disease Control, 2020).

These responses of the government collectively constitute COVID-19 regime in Nigeria. The emergent regime has weighty consequences, especially for victims of structural violence. This type of violence is inbuilt into various structures in the country (Galtung, 1971). It flows through material and non-material network. In its material form, it may constitute what social scientists call infrastructural violence (Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012). This form of violence is endemic in public medical facilities, schools, roads and security in Nigeria. In its nonmaterial form, it functions as policies, ideologies, among others that impoverish certain groups of individuals. The violence manifests very often as abdication of responsibilities and brazen breach of social contract by the government as well as disconnection and exclusion of certain categories of people from access to goods and services that enable the fulfillment of basic human needs (Farmer, 2004). The violence, thus, leads to unequal distribution of power and resources in Nigeria. Therefore, the unfolding COVID-19 regime and the violence may act in tandem, thereby turning over 70 percent of Nigeria's population, whose food and water are insecure, into what Membe in his Necropolitics calls the *living dead*.

'Necro-politics' is a coinage of Achille Mbembe inspired by Foucault's biopolitics and Fanon's colonial violence. Mbembé (2003) notes that biopolitics does not sufficiently capture some emergent forms of subjugations leading to death. These new forms of social existence do not neatly fit into Foucault's popular binary phrase *making die/letting live* (Foucault and Ewald, 2003). Rather, they are better viewed as *making live/letting die*. Necropolitics is a powerful lens illuminating ways in which contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death (Mbembé, 2003) compel politically managed bodies into an endless oscillation between life and death. Necropolitical landscape of many contexts such as slavery, apartheid, camps, the colonization of Palestine and the figure of the suicide bomber (Mbembé, 2003) as well as migration (Davies et al., 2017) have been documented.

There is, however, limited or no information on necropolitical landscape of COVID-19, especially in Africa. How the shifting contours

of COVID-19 regime acts synergistically with endemic structural violence to give vent to an exceptional necropolitical landscape, attracting youth's resistance, is still unknown in Nigeria, the biggest economy in Africa. Additionally, there is paucity of information on ethical quandaries, altruism and egoism arising as the brutal violence of the regime penetrates places and spaces of residence, recreation, leisure and livelihoods amidst the Nigerian financial elites' competitions for the face of COVID-19 charity title. This article, therefore, builds on and departs from the extant studies on necropolitical landscapes. In doing so, the article focuses on the necropolitical landscape that emerges at the intersection of COVID-19 regime and structural violence and materializes in foodscape and waterscape in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa. The pre-pandemic food and water systems of the country were already precariously fragile. As such, the article interrogates how the regime reconfigured social relationships, meanings and identities embedded in places and spaces where people interact with each other and with food and water to produce varnishing foodscapes and waterscapes (Okorie, Mphambukeli, & Amusan, 2019; Okorie & Ajayi, 2019). It, also, addresses ethical quandaries; altruism and egoism arising as the brutal violence of COVID-19 regime ripples through highly vulnerable homes and informal economy, sustaining a majority of the Nigerian citizens. The article, thus, contributes to a fledgling literature on necropolitical landscape of places in the era of borderless bio-insecurity (Nading, 2015; Keränen, 2011).

2. Theorizing necropolitical landscape of COVID-19

This article frames the necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 through the lens of the nexus between COVID-19 regime and structural violence. This is because the necropower dynamics of COVID-19 is dimorphic while the disease is epidemiological, economic and sovereignty crises. The necropower dynamics of the pandemic expresses both violent death reminiscent of the spectacles in Achille Mbembe's original formulation as well as attritional violence and slow death. COVID-19 regime and its implementation in Nigeria shows both violent and slow death while structural violence primarily foregrounds slow violence and attritional death. The regime is not only lockdowns, ban on traveling, amongst others that formed rules and protocols guiding interactions among and between individuals, institutions, and society in the control of the disease. It is, also, the Nigeria-state's brutal violence and kangaroo trial targeting individuals mainly the have-nots, who, even in the pursuit of daily bread, may seemed to have contravened the regime.

Additionally, the regime somewhat reflects an expression of sovereignty. According to Mbembe, *the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die*. In the context of Nigeria, the decision on who may live and who must die, in this pandemic era, was partly made in pre-pandemic era and during the formulation, implementation and enforcement of COVID-19 regime. Living and dying in this pandemic era is highly dependent on access to effective health care services, high quality food and water, appropriate level of hygiene, among others. Deciding who gains or who loses access to these life-dependent goods and services within a given national territory is deciding who may live and who must die. The Nigeria-state, through abdication of responsibility and implementation of corruptive privatization, outsourced the power over these life-saving goods and services to a nomadic pirate class of financial capital. Some of the programs, decrees and policies underpinning the loss of power are the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s, the Water Resources Decree 101 of the 1990s, the amendment of Section 6 (6) (c) of the Constitution and the Privatization Acts of 2000s. These structural economic alterations have enabled and still enable endemic structural violence in the country. The violence flows through material infrastructure (infrastructural violence) and nonmaterial networks, manifesting as marginalization, disconnection and exclusion of certain categories of people from access to life-saving goods and services of this pandemic era.

With over 87 million people living in extreme poverty, Nigeria overtook India in 2018 to become the headquarters of poverty. Youth unemployment and maternal mortality rank very high in sub-Saharan Africa (Innocent, 2014). Food and nutritional conditions of many are precarious (Okorie & Ajayi, 2019). Over 80 % of the population sell their malleable labor to eke out a daily living in informal sector. The ruling class is neck deep in extra-legal activities, including embezzling allocations for infrastructural and human development (Osoba, 1996). Such extra-state activities are so pervasive in all sectors of the economy. In the health sector for instance, the hospital meant for the president and his cabinet, despite its huge annual budget allocation, does not have adequate equipment, including the much-needed ventilator. The ruling class prefer medical tourism to equipping and using local clinics. As a result, the country's human capital development remains weak. Due to under-investment and extralegal activities, the country ranked 152 of the 157 countries in the World Health 2018 report. Inequality gap has been widening and youth restiveness is endemic in many parts of the country.

It is in tandem with these structural conditions that the inauguration and continual implementation of COVID-19 regime produced and continues to produce a social existence that confers the *status* of the *living dead* (Mbembé, 2003) on some households in Nigeria. For members of these households, quest for food and water may trump every rationale to submit to the extant COVID-19 regime in the country. The situation of this category of people raises ethical quandaries, which can only be resolved through addressing issues of vicious cycle of abject poverty and penury already embedded in the country's socioeconomic system. Issues of economic justice and alms giving or donation for the sake of the poorest of the poor during lock down and stay at home order are among such quandaries created by the COVID-19 regime. In this paper, the issue is whether the donation is altruistic or egoistic? Should economic justice be sacrificed on the altar of alms-giving?

According to Nagel (1978), the general thesis ... concerning altruism is that one has a direct reason to promote the interests of others—a reason which does not depend on intermediate factors such as one's own interests or one's antecedent sentiments of sympathy and benevolence. This is both claim of ethics, and a claim about what happens when someone is altruistically motivated. Contrary to this, Nagel (1978) asserts that egoism holds that each individual's reasons for acting and possible motivations for acting must arise from his own interests and desires. However, those interests may be defined. The interests of the one person can on this view motivate another or provide him with a reason only if they are connected with his interests or are objects of some sentiment of his, like sympathy, pity, or benevolence. An egoist is motivated by his or her own interests while an altruist is motivated to action by the interests of others.

To effectively attend to the epidemiological, economic and sovereignty crises of the pandemic, there is a need to trace and also treat the circumstances that led to the problems. This is in consonance with Fanon's central argument (Fanon, 1961). To him, treating individual patients must go hand-in-hand with treating the socio-economic/cultural-political contexts—the societies—in which people live. He rightly points out that *The wretched of the earth* cannot be cured unless societies are. Farmer (2004) corroborates Fanon's view. He opines that AIDS and tuberculosis in Haiti are stories of connection rather than disjuncture. To understand modern epidemics and pandemics and how they are rooted in misery and inequality, we need to understand the ways in which they are rooted in history and political economy. Only by so doing can the problems be solved. The necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 in Nigeria is not an exception. It is deeply rooted in the political economy of hunger and poverty of the country (Anger, 2010; Okorie & Ajayi, 2019). The landscape is, thus, characterized by vanishing foodscapes and waterscapes; food fraud; installment death; instant violent death; violent laborers; ethical quandaries; and resistance.

3. Materials and methods

This study used qualitative research design. Secondary data were collected through search engines, namely; Google and Google Scholar. Relevant words and phrases such as necropolitics, foodscapes, waterscapes, COVID-19 in Nigeria, lockdown in Nigeria, youths, among others, were typed into the search engines. Results were screened based on objectives of the study. Some specific social media like twitter and websites such as those of the WHO and FAO were also surfed for relevant information. The primary data were collected through phone call interviews of five of seven experts who were purposively selected. We had planned more interviews but the data collected reached a theoretical saturation point after interviews with five interviewees. The interviewees comprise a female lawyer-cum-human right activist, a female professor of food and nutrition, a male consultant security expert, a male professor of child and youth studies and a market woman, who sells food stuffs. Data saturation is a point, during an interview, where further interview does not elicit new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewees in line with the suggestions of Drabble et al. (2016). Each interview session was audio-taped.

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed by the researchers. Relying on grounded theory's three linked stages, we analyzed the contents of the transcripts developed from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Panolong, 2020). The initial stage involved open coding to identify relevant themes emanating from expressions, responses, ideas, words, and phrases used by the interviewees (Thornberg, 2017). This process continued until all ideas were absorbed into themes. The second phase involved the exploration of the theme properties and relationships. During this phase, themes and connections between them were elaborated to identify crosscutting ideas, issues, and scripts. Categories that emerged were contrasted with one another to guarantee the mutual exclusivity and specificity of their properties. The final phase involved the organization of themes around prioritized core categories such as food fraud; violent laborers; resistance; foodscapes; waterscapes, and dilemmas, among others. These core categories are organized into four sections.

4. Results and discussion

Themes that emerged from the data analysis converged around various features of the necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 earlier elaborated upon. There are strong reinforcements among views expressed by our interviewees. Also, the interviewees' perspectives on almost all the issues interrogated in this article are in consonance with ideas derived from secondary data. Thus, in the presentation and discussion of the findings, quotes from either secondary or primary sources are cited to buttress the overarching points.

4.1. The geography of corruption: the making of food fraud

The disappearance of foodscapes and waterscapes began on the eve of the lockdown across the globe. Several reports indicate that all the food items in shopping malls have been sold, following the panic buying that erupted in the wake of the declaration in various countries of the world. Pictures of emptied shelves and deserted foodscapes have been circulating in various social media. The food items disappeared from shopping malls' shelves but appeared in familiar places. The foods ended up in homes of individuals who live above poverty line while food deserts emerged in the homes of the have-nots. Attempts to ameliorate these unequal foodscapes in Nigeria is somewhat fraught with food fraud (Spink, 2016). Food fraud is a term that has multiple forms, including selling and buying of food items meant for charity.

The fraud is endemic in palliatives measures put in place by the Nigeria-state to ameliorate the impact of COVID-19 on the poor. It affects not only the quantity but also the quality of food the government

gave to the poor. All the interviewees separately agree that the quantity of the food per capita per day among the recipient households is almost insignificant. Interviewee three puts the view in a sharp relief: *The food is less than the 2000 calories per day for woman and 2500 per day for men recommended by the World Health Organization. As such, the quantity can only prolong existence within a milieu of suffering.* All the interviewees agree that the number of the recipient households is relatively too small compared to the number of the extremely poor households in the country.

Our interviewees also suggest that the inability of the government to provide significant quantity is a reflection of the country's unpreparedness for the pandemic, despite having some prior information. Besides ill-preparation, interviewee four mentions systemic corruption in the country as one of the factors contributing to the limited quantity of food distributed by the government. The interviewee draws from the national news showing the Minister of Humanitarian Aid distributing cash in the streets of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. He notes that the random distribution of cash as a palliative for the poorest of the poor in some wealthy streets of the country is a smokescreen covering bare-face corruption being perpetuated by government officials. He notes that rural and urban poor are not living in the wealthy streets of Abuja. Rather, they are in urban slums and rural area, where pattern of life is of decay and not of growth.

The interviewee four's view on how geopolitics of corruption exacerbates structural inequality in the country is buttressed by an incidence that occurred in Niger state. [Nnadozie \(2020\)](#), [Isah \(2020\)](#) and [Masadomi \(2020\)](#) variously report that forty-two bags of palliative food items comprising thirteen bags of rice, fourteen bags of millet, and fifteen bags of maize meant for Limawa Ward in Chanchanga local government area of the State were diverted and sold in an open market in Mina, the State capital. They observe that some government officials who served as members of the committee for the distribution of the palliatives did the diversion of the food meant for members of the rural municipality. The diverted foods were sold in ubiquitous gray markets in urban center of Mina. Access to the gray market is mainly granted to elites and cohorts and cronies of the ruling class. These categories of individuals in collaboration with the managers of emergency and custodians of social control apparatus sustain the market ([Tella et al., 2009](#)).

As in the distribution of cash, this extra-legal activity has a geographical dimension. Food items meant for a relatively rural local government/municipality was diverted and sold to wealthy consumers in the urban center. These events are similar to history of food fraud in Nigeria. Historically, food fraud is not new in Nigeria. The political economy of food fraud in the country is perhaps as old as the country. The food aid regime is mostly characterized with food fraud. From the Nigeria-Biafran genocidal war era ([Achebe, 2012](#)) to the COVID-19 food aid period, a high percentage of food meant to prompt equitable foodscapes has always ended up in invisible markets located in urban centers. These markets are claimed to be invisible to the law enforcement agents but they surreptitiously supported by the agents. Besides diversion of food meant for charity, some members of the ruling elites imposed extra-legal conditions, such as tribal sentiment, political affiliation, and gender, as bases for accessing the palliatives. Therefore, the decision on who may live and who must die is shaped by extra-state activities embedded in geography, gender and other social identities.

Additionally, food fraud affects the quality of food items distributed in some States as palliatives. In Ogun state, an ordinary citizen made a video, which has gone viral on social media, to decry the quality of food given to the poor as palliatives. A transcript of the video suggests that consuming the food may cause kidney and liver problems. The author of the video remarks:

This food is not different from what Hausa people pour on the ground for their goats to eat (sic). Is this fair? This is not fair at all. Your Excellency, can any of your relatives eat this useless food you instructed to be distributed to us? Will your family eat this? ([Reporters, 2020](#)).

In this light, a senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria tweeted -

The type of food given to you by your leaders in this COVID-19 time is certainly not the type they consume at home by family and maids. The quality represents what the economy can afford or what they think you deserve ([Sani, 2020](#)). More so, Oyo state found that 1800 bags of rice it received from the federal government had weevils while some had rotten. As a result, the State rejected the rice with the following remarks: *It is just right to state the facts as they are: we cannot serve our people expired rice and replace hunger with another disease* ([Adebayo, 2020](#); [Ayodele, 2020](#); [Oke, 2020](#)). Certainly, replacing hunger with diseases is one of the ways through which the necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 in Nigeria produces and confers the status of living dead ([Mbembé, 2003](#)) on some citizens. This is especially more aggravating to ordinary people who had no access to the palliative. Also, uneven distribution of the palliative inevitably foists the living-death-status on the excluded segment of the vulnerable population. This category of the population faces instalment death arising from hunger in their homes. Therefore, decision on who may live and who must die is shaped by extra-state activities embedded in classism. Besides food fraud and uneven distribution of palliatives, the necropolitics of COVID-19 engineers Mbembe's status of living dead, especially among the extreme poor, through brutality of legal violent laborers, which is explored in the next section.

4.2. Violent death and laborers meet youths' resistance

The necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 in Nigeria drips with blood from violent death. Brutal violence and violent death, most noticeable during political election, presently hold sway in many parts of the country. All the interviewees agree that exceptional orgies of violence have erupted in various waterscapes and foodscapes across Nigeria. Attempts by a combined team of army and police to enforce the stay at home order are turning many waterscapes and foodscapes into a killing field. Interviewee five notes that the art and science of policing are virtually absent even at the echelon of the Nigeria Police Force. With respect to rampant killings, interviewee four says that *giving hungry youths bullets instead of bowls of food is the sign of a failed policing system. Nigeria Police kills faster than Coronavirus*. The interviewees separately allude that the brutality of the Nigeria Police Force against the populace, especially the vulnerable, informs the perennial cat and dog relationship between the force and the youth. Therefore, the enforcement of the COVID-19 regime in various foodscapes and waterscapes by the police is being resisted in many forms and fronts by the masses, especially youth. The brutality of the police and the resistance of the youths collectively turned some foodscapes and waterscapes into a field of blood. Some cases of the brutality and violent resistance are documented from secondary sources:

Case1. At Eni Njoku street in Ebem Ohafia in Abia state, two policemen ordered a businessman, known as Mr Onwuka Arunsi and his uncle to stop offloading a truck load of beverages he had received from his supplier. Mr. Arunsi requested for explanations justifying the police's order. The officers left the trader without providing any explanations. Some minutes later, they appeared with police gun and shot Mr. Arunsi dead. The youths of the community gathered and staged a protest bearing the corpse. Then, the police command mobilized its Special Arm Robbery Squad (SARS) into the scene of the protest. The SARS shot at the protesting youths wounding one Mr. Kalu Okoro, arresting some of the youths and dispersing others. But later, the youths regrouped and mobilized more people and burnt the police station, DPO's residence, and court ([News Agency of Nigeria, 2020](#); [Alaribe & Ogbor, 2020](#); [Usman, 2020](#)).

Case 2. Police officers went into streets to compel people to stay indoors in New Tyre Market Area of Anambra state. They saw youths drinking beer in front of their house and ordered the drinkers to run into their rooms. In the process, an altercation ensued between the officers and the youths. Consequently, the police shot and killed youths while one policeman had acid attack([Usman, 2020](#)).

Case 3. A young man, later identified as Mr. Joseph Pessu, while driving around in Warri got to a road block mounted by some soldiers. Mr. Pessu attempted driving away but the officers shot him dead. Youths of the area blocked road and started a protest; then two military men unknowingly ran into the protesting youths, and a fight ensued and one officer died in the process. Then some military officers threaten to rape and infect all the women, including girl children, with HIV to avenge the dead of the soldier in Warri (Usman, 2020).

Case 4. Following the closure of Monday market in Kakuri, Kaduna state, petty traders and their customers gathered in a makeshift temporal market Trikania. The police came to disperse the traders and in the process the police shot and killed seven people (Usman, 2020).

Case 5. In Abuja, a truck loaded with grains was attacked by over fifty youths in Abuja. Without maintaining any physical distance, the youth rushed at the truck and carted away all the bags of grains. A CNN reporter interviewed one of the youths and the youth said that he is hungry and that if given any work, he was ready to get it done irrespective of the police. The interviewee stated he preferred to die of Coronavirus to dying of hunger 'virus' (Busari, 2020).

These cases underscore and highlight the shifting contours of the necropolitical landscape of COVID19, including its ethical quandaries. Should the vulnerable remain indoor and die of hunger or come out to face the highly contagious SARS-CoV-2 and the brutality of the Nigeria Police? The succeeding section interrogates these dilemmas.

4.3. . Ethical quandaries of the necropolitical landscape of COVID-19

The primary function of every responsible and responsive government is to protect lives and properties of its citizens. Even among liberals who advocate the moral supremacy of the rights of the citizens over and above every other good still acknowledge the need to allow the state and government for the sole purpose of protecting lives and properties.

One of the steps taken and is still taking by governments in Nigeria (Federal and States) is to lockdown the whole apparatus of the states. This is with the view to mandate the citizens to stay at home. The Federal government of Nigeria officially gave the stay at home order on March 29, 2020. But even before such declaration by Nigerian President (Muhammadu Buhari), state like Lagos, which is the epicenter of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, had already come up with some stringent measures to curtail the movement of citizens within the state and coming into the states. All these steps the political leaders are taking from Federal to state governments with the hope that they are the best and fastest methods to contain, fight and end this vicious and deadly virus; COVID-19. The belief is that during a pandemic period of the magnitude we are having presently, tyranny works better than a democratic process of decision making. This is so because the democratic process is more cumbersome, delaying and time-consuming whereas the need to fight COVID-19 pandemic has to be swift, drastic and resolute without minding the consequences on the citizenry even the consequent human right violations that would follow. No doubt, such drastic step works better in a tyrannical and totalitarian rule or system. This is exactly what happened with the declaration of total lockdown by the Federal Government of Nigeria and some state Governors in a bid to enforce stay at home order to fight the spread of corona virus in Nigeria. They are doing this with the conviction that it is the best and fastest way to fight this strange virus, thereby securing the lives and properties of Nigerians.

This problem is both political and moral. It is political because the state is supposedly expected, at least by the liberals, to be neutral in deciding the conception of good life for the citizens and hence expected not to impose a particular conception of the good life. Total lockdown and stay at home order more or less amount to the imposition of a particular conception of the good life especially when the state has not provided for the daily needs of the citizens. The problem is also moral in

the sense that the state should not intervene or curtail the rights of the citizens since such rights are supreme and should not be overridden by any other good. In this case, the moral right of the citizens tends to clash with that of the Nigerian state. Which should take paramount; that of the Nigerian state or the citizens?

As earlier discussed, the declaration of total lockdown by Nigerian government came with some unpalatable and undesirable consequences. Hunger as the major consequence of the COVID-19 total lockdown leads to a moral dilemma for the citizens: the dilemma of either going out or staying at home as the government has ordered and directed. As a citizen, it is either you go out against government order, get arrested, jailed, shot by police brutality, infected by the virus and die or you stay at home, obeying government order but die of hunger-instalment death. The dilemma is a double-edged sword. The options for the citizens remain to either obey the stay-at-home order and die of hunger or to go out, fend for themselves and make their daily bread but probably get infected by the virus. Going out comes with different risks such as facing brutality of the law enforcement agents who have been instructed and empowered by the state to use maximum force on erring citizens.

Before the end of the first two weeks of COVID-19 lockdown, most Nigerian citizens were already tired. They started defying government order by going out to look for daily bread since the feeling is that the government locked them at home, making promises of palliatives without matching their words with action. Even where the palliative is made available, food fraud reduced both the quality and quantity, hence the motivation for defiance. This defiance was restricted by law enforcement agents but many Nigerians challenged and reacted with force, which in some cases resulted in physical violence and death. After all, *a hungry man is an angry man. Also, a hungry man does not listen to stories, no matter how sweet such stories are.* What is paramount at that point is survival which is natural to every human being. A caption of an interview by a CNN reporter in Abuja, says the mind of many Nigerians - *Nigerian citizen: I prefer to die from COVID-19 than hunger* (Busari, 2020). The caption reflects the choice of many Nigeria youth, albeit, it has dilemmas.

Dilemmas ordinarily are situations with undesirable or unsatisfactory choices whereby somebody (a moral agent) must choose one of two or more unsatisfactory alternatives. In Philosophy in general and Logic in particular, dilemmas occur when we have a form of reasoning that though will involve valid arguments but will lead to undesirable alternatives or choices. What do we do in a situation like that? This is the present situation of Nigerian citizens, especially among the youths with the COVID-19 lockdown and stay at-home order. Where do the citizens go from here especially as the specific and possible time frame of the end is not yet known? This situation poses moral dilemmas.

According to De Haan, 2001, a moral dilemma is a situation in which the agent morally ought to do A and morally ought to do B, while he cannot do A as well as B". In a similar vein, Morscher (2002) assert that "a moral dilemma is sometimes described as a situation in which it is morally obligatory for an agent both to perform a certain action and at the same time not to perform it, i.e. to omit the very same action". These two definitions bring out the moral situations confronting Nigeria and Nigerians with the COVID-19 lockdown and the attendant consequences. As moral agents, should Nigerians come out in the face of the total lockdown to pursue their daily bread in order to avert hunger at home but face the risk of infection or should they stay at home to avoid being infected but face the devastating effect of hunger at home? In line with the first definition above, Nigerians as moral agents morally ought to do either A or B but cannot do both. This implies that it is either Nigerians defy the government stay-at-home order, in which case face the consequences of hunger or they come out and be infected by COVID-19. From the prevailing situation, it has been observed that majority of hungry Nigerians prefer to come out to fend for themselves. They are tired of staying at home with the attendant consequences of hunger. They have demonstrated that it is better for them to come out

and take care of their needs by engaging in their businesses than to die of hunger at home. Many Nigerians believe that COVID-19 scourge is for the upper-class citizens who, as a matter of fact imported it from foreign countries such as United Kingdom, Germany, USA, China, Spain, Italy etc. Also, they believe that the government and political leaders locking down everywhere in Nigeria lack such moral ground to do so since no palliative has been provided to them, and even those who received the palliative were not better off. This is the reason why they prefer to go out to take care of their needs and should not be prevented.

Going by the second definition above, Nigerians as moral agents are obligated to obey government order to stay at home to avoid the risk associated with COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, it is morally obligatory for them not to stay-at-home, fold their arms and die of hunger. It is a looming danger that they must avert. The only way to avert such is to go out and look for their daily needs. They cannot go out to fend for themselves and still stay at home at the same time. Both are morally obligatory but they cannot do both at the same time. This is the ethical dilemma. They cannot only do one. If they go out in a bid to satisfy their hunger they cannot stay at home. But if they stay at home, they cannot go out but they chose to go out, after all, palliatives are not provided.

To the Nigerian government, their effort is geared towards saving lives and properties. No doubt, such initiative amounts to positive duty or obligation as against negative obligations that involve the obligation not to injure or harm others. It is a negative obligation because it involves the duty to abstain from doing something. Positive obligations are obligations to do good or prevent or repair evil. According to [Tugendhat \(1995\)](#), *to rescue a person from drowning or starving or to help him move if handicapped are examples of positive obligations. All positive obligations can be subsumed under the duty to help.* Nigerian government has positive obligation to protect all citizens of Nigeria against COVID-19 pandemic but if we characterize such as help on the part of the government, what then is their constitutional duty since overcoming this pandemic is more or less protecting the lives and properties of Nigerian citizens. This is because the commonest and the most fundamental function of the government towards its citizens is to protect lives and property. In view of this, [Tugendhat \(1995\)](#) opined that:

The sole purpose of government lies in the provision of a central power that prevents harm. The function of government is to protect those rights possessed by the citizens. Human rights, therefore, consist in the right, enforced by government; that people do not harm each other plus the right that the government itself does not infringe upon these rights. A legitimate government is a minimal government of self-restraint.

Going by the above assertion, what Nigerian government has done by declaring total lockdown and stay-at-home in order to contain and combat COVID-19 pandemic should have been followed up with the provision of adequate palliative and relief materials, void of food fraud, gender- and ethnic-biases. By doing so, their action would have been properly described as a positive duty. But by locking down everywhere without any palliative and nothing for succor hence, their action is not likely to be properly characterized as positive obligation. It is so because Nigerian government with its method of containing and combating COVID-19 humiliates the citizens. What we mean by humiliation is that the government with their action no longer considers the citizens as ends in themselves, but as mere tools or things for achieving an end-combating COVID-19 pandemic. Nigerian citizens are denied self-respect, thus denying them the attribute of dignity. In the words of [Tugendhat \(1995\)](#), *To live under undignified conditions means to live under conditions unfit for a human being.* This is the aftermath of the ethical dilemma of COVID-19 lockdown. Nigerians through the actions of the government have been subjected to live in undignified conditions that are unfit for a minimally satisfactory human life.

To worsen the situation, the government even held on to the cash donations by few elites who are friends of the leaders as well as private

sector drivers. Although the motive of such donations has been various described and condemned by some Nigerians. Some are of the view that the donors' motives are egoistic while others are of the view that the motive of the donors are altruistic. This divergence of views about the donations has thrown up a subtle debate that requires ethical clarifications. The next section examines the donations through altruistic and egoistic lenses, illuminating contextual issues that allow their qualifications.

4.4. Charity in COVID-19 necropolitical landscape: between altruism and egoism

The juxtaposition between ethical altruism and egoism in moral motivation and justification of human actions and decisions plays out in the fight against Covid-19. For example, do we describe donations, almsgiving, and provision of palliatives in Nigeria, especially by private sector drivers as altruistic or egoistic acts/behavior? Few rich and upper-class Nigerians have donated billions of naira to assist the Federal Government of Nigeria in the fight against Covid-19. Can such acts be characterized as altruistic or egoistic? This section aims to examine that. What is Altruism? What is Egoism? What are altruistic and egoistic behaviors, anyway?

By definition, altruism as a moral theory holds that moral good consists in looking after the interests of others first. A moral agent is expected to perform an action that will promote the interests of others but not being oblivious of his or her own. According to [Nagel \(1978\)](#), *The principle of altruism is connected with conception of oneself as merely one person among others. It arises from the capacity to view oneself simultaneously as 'I' and someone-impersonally specifiable individual.* From this definition, an altruistic act or behavior will be any behavior motivated merely by the belief that someone else will benefit or avoid harm by it. In line with this definition, the actions of Nigerian donors may not properly be described as altruistic since they targeted what they would benefit from such donation.

An altruist is someone who is primarily motivated into action by the interests of others. An altruist's interest is derivative or secondary. In the cases of donation by the drivers of Nigerian economy, their actions were never motivated by the interests of the vulnerable or poorest of the poor. The reason for their donations were never to promote the interests of others over and above their own.

The motivating factor into performing an action to an altruist is not the agent's interests or any subjective reason from the agent himself/herself. Rather what motivate an altruist into action are the interests of others. Others are moral agents who are involved in the same action but completely different from the acting agent. The moral agent is fully aware of his/her interests but such interest is not primary. This does not imply that the moral agent is oblivious of his/her interest. This is the reason why [Nagel \(1978\)](#) believes that *altruism involves a willingness to act in consideration of the interests of other persons without the need of ulterior motive.* In the case of the donations made by Nigerian politicians and captains of industries during Covid-19 lock down was tainted by ulterior motive and self-interest.

Ethical egoism says that moral good consists in looking after one's own self-interest. An egoist in this regard is someone whose actions are basically motivated by self-interest. To an egoist, an action is morally right if it leads to the satisfaction or promotion of the moral agent's self-interest, otherwise it is wrong. According to Burgess, *egoism is the view that the right thing to do is to maximize one's own utility* ([Burgess-Jackson, 2013](#)). An egoist believes that the right thing to do in every action is to promote the self-interest of the moral agent because it is the right thing to do. In a similar vein, [Nagel \(1978\)](#) asserts:

Egoism holds that each individual's reasons for acting and possible motivations for acting must arise from his own interests and desires; however those interests may be defined. The interests of the one person can on this view motivate another or provide him with a

reason only if they are connected with his interests or are objects of some sentiment of his, like sympathy, pity, or benevolence

From the above, we can infer that the only factor that motivates an egoist into performing an action is the agent's self-interest. This implies that the basis of morality for an egoist is his or her self-interests. Egoism as a moral theory of evaluation emphasized the relatively specific and narrow view that the only source of reasons for action lies in the interests of the agent.

Similarly, Regis (1979) asserts that ethical egoism has two defining characteristics: (1) that the achievement of one's personal happiness and well-being ought to be the ultimate (but not only) end of one's actions, and (2) that no one has any unchosen moral obligation or responsibility to serve the interests or satisfy the needs of others. Regis' definition is more attenuated at least for not maintaining that self-interests are the only source of reason or motivation for action for an egoist.

We are not interested in the assessment of these definitions of ethical altruism and egoism. Whether or not the definitions are adequate, too broad or narrow is not our business in this article. One common attribute of the definitions of altruism is that the interests of others other than that of the moral agent are primary and ultimate. Also, one common factor among all the definitions of egoism above is that the primary or ultimate source or motivation for action is the agent's self-interest. In the light of these definitions vis-à-vis the provision of palliatives and relief materials by the few upper-class citizens for the fight against Covid-19, how do we characterize their actions. That is, is their act of donations altruistic or egoistic?

As pointed above, altruistic act or behavior is ultimately devoid of self-interest while egoistic act or behavior is ultimately devoid of the interest of others. The interest of the moral agent is primary in egoism while the interest of others, apart from that of the moral agent is primary in altruism. In view of this, do these donations serve the interests of these donors such that we can say that they are egoistic or otherwise? The action of the few rich individuals that donated to the Federal Government in the fight against covid-19 in Nigeria is egoistic. The first reason why their actions are egoistic is that instead of reaching out to this category of Nigerians, otherwise described as the poorest of the poor, they made the donations to the Federal Government because of what they hope to benefit. Such benefits include government granting them tax waivers or invasion. They seem to be sacrificing economic justice on the altar of alms-giving. This is because they are captains of industries and private sector drivers in Nigeria. The political and economic policies of the government make or mar their businesses. They know they are not likely to get anything in return if they donate directly to these vulnerable Nigerians that need assistance and support. The so-called poorest of the poor do not have anything to give them in return hence there is no need of reaching them directly but through the government. But their action would have been altruistic if they had donated to the needy Nigerians without expecting anything back. By donating to the Federal Government of Nigeria even without minding whether it gets to the poor Nigerians is guided by their self-interests as the ultimate motive for such donations.

Also, there is a belief among the poor Nigerians that Covid-19 is a class disease. The disease is for the rich class; after all it was imported into Nigeria by the elite and political class. In this regard, the rich and upper-class citizens making donations to the Federal Government are doing so for self-interested reasons. It is assumed they are identifying with the members of their class. The virus is affecting mostly the upper-class citizens hence their donations is a way of showing solidarity to their fellow elites in Nigerian society. Again, their action is egoistic. To buttress this point, we all know the devastating and killing rate of diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, infant mortality, etc. but these elites and upper-class citizens though might have at one point or the other donated to fight these diseases but not in the manner that they responded to Covid-19. It has been speculated, rightly or wrongly that such diseases are for the poor Nigeria citizens but the truth remains that

the impacts of these diseases affect all classes of people but the rich have better access to the drugs and treatment. The actions of the elites that donated cannot possibly be characterized as altruistic when their self-interests are the ultimate motives behind their donations hence their action are egoistic. Nigerians are therefore faced with two necessary evils-disease and hunger which they must choose one. And either way, it will still be a case of dying by corona virus disease or dying by hunger. This becomes a case of choice devoid of alternatives which is a corroboration of Mbembe's framework of necropolitics adopted and above. It has reduced the vulnerable Nigerians to the status of the living dead. This is also part of the ethical dilemma discussed above.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This article explores the shifting necropolitical landscape of COVID-19 in Nigeria to indicate that the landscape is a product of intersections of structural conditions and COVID-19 regime. As such, the landscape, which is replete with food fraud, violent death, resistance, ethical quandaries, altruism and egoism, is disproportionately experienced across the country. The have-nots, especially those who are among the poorest of the poor bear the brunt of the COVID regime. They are the ones on whom the necropolitical landscape COVID-19 imposes Mbembe's *status of living dead*, through various forms of food fraud that replace hunger with diseases as well as undergird uneven foodscapes. They are also the victims of violent death and violent laborers manning the dangerous necropolitical landscape. These violent laborers are a product of a vacuum in the art and science of policing in Nigeria as well as a reflection of the abyss into which security has descended in the country.

In a country with such an abysmal security arrangement, the implementation of a copied COVID-19 regime, raises dilemmas with a double-edged sword configuration. The options for the poorest of the poor are to either obey the stay-at-home order and experience installment death driven by hunger or to go out, fend for themselves and make their daily bread but probably get infected by the virus or killed by legal violent laborers. Therefore, the have-nots apparently face a possibility of total elimination, which runs counter to the noble view of a nation-state as the protector of its citizenry.

Moreover, without the provision of adequate palliative and relief materials, devoid of food fraud, gender and ethnic-biases to every citizen, the Nigeria government loses its moral ground to implement a COVID-19 regime it copied from the West. With the provision of necessary palliatives, the implementation becomes a positive duty. But by locking down everywhere without any palliative and nothing for succor their action is not likely to be properly characterized as positive obligation. It is so because Nigerian government with its method of containing and combating COVID-19 humiliates and depersonalizes the citizens.

Unlike the West where Nigeria copied its COVID-19 regime, the country may not be able to implement a successful total lockdown, given its prevailing socio-economic conditions. To meet the gap between what the country can afford and what is actually required, financial elites with vast war-chest must take their charity projects in the country beyond their morbid quest for the face COVID-19 charity title, which is an egoism masquerading in the garb of altruism. Altruistic interventions include addressing issues of inequality and other diseases viewed by many as those of the poor. They must embrace economic justice. Finally, the government should seek for a modified COVID-19 regime that factors the extant material conditions of the have-nots into the arrangement.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Victor Ogbonnaya Okorie: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Ndukaku Okorie:** Conceptualization,

Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing. **Lere Amusan:** Validation, Software, Supervision, Resources, Project administration.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the funding received from NRF African Rapid Grant UID: 130305.

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